



## **VEHICLE SECURITY AND CRIME PREVENTION TIPS**

San Diego Police Department

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Although a professional vehicle thief can defeat most security measures and quickly break into and steal a locked vehicle, most vehicle break-ins and thefts are carried out by amateurs who take advantage of the carelessness of drivers in leaving vehicles unlocked, valuables in sight, etc. The tips in this paper deal with preventing vehicle break-ins and thefts; helping to recover a stolen vehicle or property stolen from a vehicle; preventing vandalism; and buying a used vehicle. They will help prevent most types of crimes involving vehicles.

Additional tips on personal safety and security, home security, vacation safety and security, senior safety and security, preventing crimes against businesses, preventing fraud and identity theft, reporting crime and suspicious activities, reporting suspicious activities for terrorism prevention, reporting disorder and other problems, obtaining crime information, dealing with homeless people, and starting a Neighborhood Watch program are available in the CRIME PREVENTION AND EDUCATION section of the SDPD website at [www.sandiego.gov/police](http://www.sandiego.gov/police).

### **PREVENTING VEHICLE BREAK-INS**

The following tips help prevent vehicle break-ins, which could lead to theft of the vehicle itself or of property items from the vehicle.

- Never leave anything in plain sight, not even empty bags or boxes. Conceal all navigation aids, cellular phones, audio systems, sunglasses, etc. inside your vehicle. Put cameras, packages, sports equipment, firearms, hand tools, and other valuables in the trunk before you park, never after you park. Thieves may be watching. And take anything you can't afford to lose with you, e.g., a wallet, purse, or laptop computer. Thieves don't break into vehicles unless they plan to steal them or take what's visible inside.
- Park in an open, well-lighted, and populated area near your destination, preferably one in view of a security camera. Avoid parking near trucks, vans, camper shells, dumpsters, and other objects that obstruct visibility and provide hiding places. Also avoid parking near people loitering or sitting in vehicles.
- Park in lots or garages where you don't have to leave your keys. If you have to leave your vehicle keys, remove all home and other keys from you chain. Also, don't leave your garage door opener where it is easily accessible, and hide your vehicle registration, proof of insurance, and any other papers with your home address on them where they are not likely to be found.

- Park in your garage, if you have one. Don't leave your vehicle on the street, in an alley, or on your driveway. If you have to park on a street, avoid dark or isolated areas.
- Turn off your engine, roll up all windows, lock all doors, and take your keys with you even if you are making a quick stop at a store or gas station. Also make sure the trunk and hood are locked.
- Don't leave your vehicle in an unattended public lot for an extended period time.
- Buy a vehicle with interior hood and trunk lock releases. Install a secondary hood lock if your vehicle does not have one.
- Replace knob-type door lock buttons with tapered ones.
- Install an alarm system that will sound when someone attempts to break in, move, tilt, or start your vehicle. Always activate the system when leaving the vehicle.
- Check your vehicle if you hear the alarm sound. But don't try to stop a person attempting to break in. Get a good description of the person and call the police.
- When you lock your vehicle with a Remote Keyless Entry (RKE) fob make sure that all the doors are locked before leaving your vehicle, especially in public parking lots. There has been an increase in the use of jammers to prevent the RKE signal from activating the door locks.

## **PREVENTING THEFTS OF CARS, SUVs, AND LIGHT TRUCKS**

- Turn your wheels sharply toward the curb when parking on a street.
- Use anti-theft devices that can be attached to the steering wheel or column, or brake pedal.
- Install fuel or power cut-off switches.
- Buy a vehicle with a locking ignition or steering column.
- Attach a tire lock or boot to the rim of one wheel.
- Don't hide a spare key in your vehicle.

## **PREVENTING THEFTS OF MOTORCYCLES**

- When at home park and lock your bike in the garage, preferably behind a car. And make sure the garage is secure.
- When out park in a well-lighted area in full view of people in the area and within the coverage of a security camera.
- Try to avoid parking between larger vehicles as they provide cover for thieves.
- Do not leave your helmet or riding gear with your bike.
- Lock your ignition and remove the key. Also lock your bike's forks or disc brakes with a large external lock.
- Cover your bike when you leave it unattended. Use a cover with grommets so the cover can be locked in place. And set the alarm to activate when the cover is removed. Few thieves will risk a blind theft. They usually look for certain models.
- Chain and lock your bike to a secure, immovable object when it's unattended. Use a high tensile-strength chain and a matching security lock. Loop the chain through the rear wheel or frame and make sure it is tight around your bike. Do not let it rest on the ground. And use multiple locks. A thief might be prepared for one but not the other.
- Lock bikes together when riding with others.
- Install a good audible alarm and a hidden kill switch.
- Mark and photograph all parts that might be sold separately. Use the bike's frame number. Put the marks in visible and secret places.
- Call 911 if you see a bike theft in progress. Signs of a possible theft include the following: (1) one or more people standing near a bike, (2) a bike being loaded into a van or truck, and (3) a bike being transported on its side.

## **PREVENTING THEFTS OF BICYCLES**

- Never leave an expensive bike unattended outside. Any bicycle lock can be defeated.
- The best locks to use for securing bikes to racks are U-locks or chain locks. U-locks have a thick steel shackle that is attached to a crossbar with a keyed lock. Chain locks have tough links that are typically attached with a small disc lock that requires a key to open. Locks should secure the frame and both wheels.

- Never leave an expensive bike in a common storage facility in an apartment or condo building. Keep it in your unit.
- The best bicycle enclosures are made of metal and secured with shielded- or hidden-shackle padlocks. The former can be ordinary padlocks that are covered with a metal shield that prevents a person from cutting the shackle or the hasp with a bolt cutter. The shield would be open at the bottom for a key to be inserted to open the lock. The latter are padlocks with both shackle and hasp shielded.

## **PREVENTING THEFTS FROM VEHICLES**

- Never leave anything of value in plain sight. Conceal all navigation aids, cellular phones, audio systems, sunglasses, etc. inside your vehicle.
- Take anything you can't afford to lose with you, e.g., a wallet, purse, or laptop computer. Put cameras, packages, sports equipment, firearms, hand tools, and other valuables in the trunk before you park, never after you park. Thieves may be watching.
- When shopping, ask the store to hold all your purchases until you are finished there so you can carry everything to your vehicle in one trip. If you need to make more than one trip to load your trunk, move your vehicle to a different area of the parking lot after each trip.
- Make sure that any valuables that were locked in the glove box or trunk were not taken or tampered with when you return to your vehicle. Thieves are able to get into some vehicles without leaving any visible signs of a break-in.
- Take the removable face of your CD player with you even if you are going to be gone for a few minutes.
- Lock truck-bed toolboxes.
- Install locking devices on batteries, wheels, audio equipment, spare tires, gas tanks, etc.
- Make several slices through your license plate registration sticker after it has been placed on the plate. If the sticker is stolen you can get a replacement from your local Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) office.
- When pumping gas and no one else is in your vehicle, roll up all the windows, lock the doors, and take your keys with you so you don't lock yourself out of the vehicle or leave the window nearest you open. This will prevent someone from taking anything you may have left in the vehicle, e.g., a purse on the front seat, while you are not looking.

## **PREVENTING VEHICLE THEFTS**

The following tips will help prevent vehicle thefts while driving and in parking lots and garages. But if you get involved with a person who wants to steal your vehicle, don't resist or argue. Your life is much more valuable than your vehicle. Be especially alert when parking at fast food places, gas stations, ATMs, and shopping areas along suburban highways.

### **While Driving**

- Keep your doors locked and your windows closed.
- Know where you are going. Stop and get directions before you get lost.
- Avoid driving alone, especially at night and in dangerous areas.
- Never pick up hitchhikers.
- Drive to the nearest open business and call the police if anyone is following you. Don't go home.
- Keep your vehicle in gear when stopped for traffic signals or signs. Try to leave room to drive away if threatened. Be alert for anyone approaching your vehicle.
- Keep purses and other valuables out of view when driving alone. Put them in the trunk or on the floor.
- Honk your horn or flash your emergency lights to attract attention if you are threatened while in your vehicle.
- Stay in your vehicle if you stop to aid others. Find out what the problem is and offer to call or drive to the nearest phone and report the situation.
- Keep your vehicle in good mechanical condition so it won't break down and leave you stranded on the road. Also keep enough gas in the tank so you won't run out.
- If your vehicle breaks down or runs out of gas, pull over to the right as far as possible, raise the hood, and call or wait for help. Remain in your vehicle with the doors and windows locked until you can identify any person who comes to help.

- Be wary of minor rear-end collisions, especially at night on dark freeway off-ramps. Remain in your vehicle with the doors and windows locked if you are uneasy or suspicious. Drive to the nearest open business to check the damage and exchange insurance information.

### **In Parking Lots and Garages**

- Park in open, well-lighted, and populated areas near your destination.
- Avoid parking near trucks, vans, dumpsters, and other objects that obstruct visibility and provide hiding places. Avoid parking or walking near strangers loitering or sitting in vehicles. Check that no one is hiding around your vehicle before you get out.
- Report any lights that are out to the facility operator.
- Lock your vehicle and take your keys with you.
- Conceal maps or travel brochures that might indicate you are a tourist.
- Have your key in hand so you can open the door immediately when you return to your vehicle.
- Check that no one is hiding in or around your vehicle before you get in.
- Ask a co-worker or security guard to escort you to your vehicle if your work late.

### **RECOVERING A STOLEN VEHICLE OR PROPERTY STOLEN FROM A VEHICLE**

- Call the police immediately and provide a complete description of the vehicle and any property taken from it, including a stolen license plate. (You can get a replacement plate from your local DMV office.) Call **911** if the theft is in progress. Otherwise call the non-emergency number of the law enforcement agency that has jurisdiction of the area in which the crime was committed. In the City of San Diego the SDPD non-emergency numbers are **(619) 531-2000** or **(858) 484-3154**. In areas served by the San Diego County Sheriff the number is **(858) 565-5200**. The numbers for other city police departments can be found online or in a telephone directory. Vehicles should be described by: year, make, model, color(s), Vehicle Identification Number (VIN), insurance company and policy number, license plate number and state, and name of any tracking and locator system installed in the vehicle. Property should be described by type, make, model, serial number, and fair market value. Make a list of all this information and keep it in a safe place.
- It is important to report all vehicle crimes even if the loss is small and you are not planning to file an insurance claim. This enables the agency to assess the magnitude and nature of the problem and assign prevention, patrol, and enforcement assets accordingly.
- If your vehicle is stolen in Mexico, report the theft to the local Mexican authorities and obtain a certified copy of the report. When you return home bring the report, your identification, and the vehicle title to a California Highway Patrol (CHP) office. After this, if you locate and recover your vehicle in Mexico, notify the U.S. Customs inspector when crossing the border. You will be sent to a secondary inspection area where a CHP or SDPD officer will examine the vehicle and check your identification. The officer will release the vehicle to the registered owner and remove it from the stolen-vehicle data base.
- Etch your driver license number on all valuable, removable items, e.g., audio equipment.
- Etch the VIN on various places on the vehicle itself. Do not use your Social Security number.
- Don't leave your driver license in the vehicle.
- Keep a record of the VIN, license plate number, and insurance information in your wallet or purse. Also be able to provide the information listed above for any property that might be stolen from the vehicle.
- Don't leave your vehicle title (pink slip) in the vehicle.
- Install a vehicle tracking and location system that can be activated after the vehicle is reported as stolen.
- Spray microdots carrying the VIN all over the vehicle.

### **PREVENTING VANDALISM**

- Park in open, well-lighted, and populated areas near your destination. Avoid parking near trucks, vans, dumpsters, and other objects that obstruct visibility and provide hiding places. Avoid parking near strangers loitering or sitting in vehicles.
- Park in your garage, if you have one. Don't leave your vehicle on the street, in an alley, or on your driveway. If you have to park on a street, avoid dark or isolated areas.
- Don't leave your vehicle in an unattended public lot for an extended period time.

- Buy a vehicle with interior hood and truck lock releases. Install a secondary hood lock if your vehicle does not have one.

## BUYING A USED VEHICLE

- Be suspicious of a ridiculously low price or a fresh paint job on a late-model vehicle, especially a luxury car or SUV.
- Be suspicious of low mileage for the age of the vehicle. The problem of odometer fraud is more common in newer vehicles that have accumulated high mileage in a short time. Indicators of actual mileage include wear on tires, floor mats, seats, and pedals. If you suspect odometer fraud you should consider can buying a vehicle history report from a commercial website by going online and searching for “vehicle history report.” If you suspect that the odometer has been rolled back or tampered with on a vehicle purchased from a used car dealer you should file a complaint in writing with the DMV. Go to the Forms section of its website at **www.dmv.ca.gov** and download a Record of Complaint Form with Instruction and Additional Information.
- Make sure the seller is the owner named on the vehicle title. Don’t be afraid to ask to see some photo ID.
- Verify past insurance and financing, and current registration and license plate sticker.
- Make sure the VIN has not been tampered with and matches the number on the vehicle title, registration, and proof of insurance. Thieves have been known to sell stolen vehicles with cloned VINs, i.e., those of vehicles not stolen. Call the San Diego County Regional Auto Theft Task Force at **(858) 627-4000** if you find any discrepancies.
- Obtain both sets of the original keys.
- Make sure registration fees paid to dealer are sent to DMV promptly.
- Don’t be fooled by online sellers who promise ways to avoid the sales tax on a vehicle purchase. Don’t trust any company that asks for a wire deposit made out to an individual. They have no vehicles to sell and you will lose your deposit in an untraceable transaction. And if you see any potentially fraudulent or misleading vehicle sales ads, report them to the California DMV Investigations office at **(858) 627-3951**.

## SELLING A VEHICLE

- Never sell your vehicle to someone without meeting him or her in person.
- Never agree to sell a vehicle to someone who does not want to see it or test drive it.
- Meet a prospective buyer in a public place.
- Obtain the following information from a prospective buyer if he or she wants to take a test drive: full name, address, phone number, driver license state and number, and insurance company and policy number. Note the expiration dates of the license and policy. This information should be obtained even if the buyer does not take a test drive.
- If you go on a test drive tell someone you trust where you are going, the time you expect to return, and the prospective buyer’s name and address.
- If you let the prospective buyer(s) take a test drive without you, set a time for him or her to return, and ask to hold his or her vehicle keys.
- Secure payment by cash or cashier’s check before you give your vehicle to the buyer. Never take a personal check.
- If you take a cashier’s check, verify its validity with the issuing bank before depositing it in your bank. Your bank may cash the check, but if it doesn’t clear you will have to return the money.
- Require payment in full. Don’t sell on installments.
- Don’t agree to any plan where the buyer gives you a check for more than the sales price and asks you to refund the difference. The “payment” check is likely to be fraudulent.